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Texas Farmers, Ranchers Harvest Bounty of Success through Conservation

USDA-NRCS Recognizes Landowners during National Agriculture Week March 15-21

TEMPLE, TEXAS, March 16, 2009 – Texans today can thank farmers, ranchers, land managers and others across the state during National Ag Week March 15-21 for their conservation efforts in protecting and improving soil, water and air quality, plant and wildlife habitats.

National Agriculture Day, March 20, takes place on the first day of spring as a way to celebrate American agriculture and the farmers and ranchers – the stewards of the land – who provide the food, fiber, plants, shelter, energy and other materials we use on a daily basis.

Many of these farmers, ranchers and landowners work with the United States Department of Agriculture’s Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and their local soil and water conservation districts in a voluntary, cooperative partnership to develop comprehensive conservation plans for their operations. These plans help the landowners meet their management goals to conserve, manage and care for the natural resources, livestock and wildlife, by making improvements to farm and rangeland, creating and restoring wetlands, and improving wildlife habitat and grazing lands. As part of any operation’s private business, these plans are confidential.

“In 2008, the near-record level of technical and financial assistance to Texas land stewards helped them address a wide array of natural resource issues and accelerate conservation work on millions of acres to benefit all Texans – not just those who implemented the conservation on their land,” said Don Gohmert, NRCS state conservationist for Texas.

Helping People Help the Land

Private landowners are the key to effective conservation efforts in Texas, since 95 percent of the state's land is privately owned. With NRCS technical and financial assistance, landowners implemented the following conservation improvements in 2008:

- 5.7 million acres were enhanced for wildlife habitats, while individual conservation plans were written covering more than 8 million acres.
- Landowners implemented conservation practices to improve soil quality on nearly 1.2 million acres across the state and water quality on another 8 million acres.
- Wetlands were created, protected, or restored on 8,300 acres.
- Irrigation efficiency was improved on 473,000 acres.
- Grazing land and forest land conservation efforts were implemented on 8 million acres.
- To address water quality issues, landowners worked with NRCS to develop 170 agricultural waste management plans and implement 282 plans.

NRCS staff also provided assistance to city planners, watershed groups, local and state government and civic organizations to produce clean water and air, healthy and productive soil, and scenic landscapes across the state.

Gohmert said, "NRCS's vision is 'Productive Lands Healthy Environment,' and we thank and recognize the landowners, land managers and other partners, who work hand-in-hand with us, to implement conservation efforts on their land to protect and improve the natural resources of the Lone Star State. The healthy environmental benefits of their efforts reach far beyond the farm gate to all Texans."

For more information about protecting and improving the natural resources on your land, contact NRCS or soil and water conservation district at your local USDA Service Center, listed in phone directories under U.S. Government, or visit the Texas NRCS Web site at www.tx.nrcs.usda.gov.

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